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Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences 213 (2015) 794 – 800

Procedia
Social and Behavioral Sciences

20th International Scientific Conference Economics and Management - 2015 (ICEM-2015)

The Importance of Stakeholders in Human Resource Training Projects

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Abstract

The purpose of the paper is to create the evaluation model of stakeholders' importance in human resource training projects. To attain the papers purpose the literature review, content analysis, expert survey and qualitative synthesis are used. The main results of study reveal that training participants mostly consider the training projects' appropriateness to own professional and personal interest. While managers and training providers highly value the application of new knowledge, skills and attitudes derived from training projects. Therefore, in order to generate stakeholders' interest to human resource training projects and to ensure the projects' usefulness, the individual benefits of training and the possibilities of learning application should be analysed and communicated for relevant stakeholder group. In view of the fact that human resource training projects are primarily focused on improvement of organisational performance, the congruence of training participants' and their managers' expectations about such projects is significant.

Peer-review under responsibility of Kaunas University of Technology, School of Economics and Business

Keywords: Stakeholder; Human resource; Training, Project; Evaluation.

Introduction

Nowadays, the innovative approaches to human resource training should be applied to ensure organisation with knowledgeable and skilful human resources. The fast "ageing" of knowledge and skills make reasonable the development of short-term training as projects that are worked out for specific training needs. To provide maximal benefits the training projects must incorporate interests of main stakeholders groups.

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Peer-review under responsibility of Kaunas University of Technology, School of Economics and Business
doi:10.1016/j.sbspro.2015.11.477

The stakeholder theory, elaborated by Freeman (1984), has growing interest in various areas of management. In project management literature, stakeholder research is viewed as complex and difficult, but there are clear understandings that stakeholders have a key role in project implementation and performance indicators.

In project management theory, the stakeholders are analysed in the context of innovation (e.g. Elias, Cavana & Jackson, 2002), construction project management (e.g. Olander, 2007), information and communication technology (e.g. Bailur, 2006) etc. However, there are a few studies devoted to the application of stakeholder approach in management of human resource training projects. The theme of stakeholder approach to training as such is popular in human resource development, but in the most of studies, conducted in this area, the stakeholders are analysed in the context of training viewed as formative or standardised process (e.g. Michalski & Cousins, 2000) or in the context of the certain model of training evaluation (e.g. Nickols, 2005). Therefore, this paper is focused on exploration of stakeholders' interests or requirements in the different phases of the training project lifecycle, based on the theory of the project lifecycle and the human resource training stages, and on the different, well-known models of training evaluation.

1. The theoretical background of human resource training projects for stakeholders

In human resource management literature, human resource training is defined as the application of formal processes to impart knowledge and help employee to acquire the skills necessary for them to perform their jobs satisfactorily (e.g. Armstrong, 2009). The term "formal" in this and similar definitions of training emphasizes the training that follows some designed form, contrary to informal training that does not have a consistent form. The effective human resource training should be systematic, therefore some authors stress that training is the systematic process by which employee learning is promoting (e.g. Latham, 1988).

There are some differences between human resource training process, system and project. A training process produces results through work being done in the process, while a training system produces results through the interaction of processes (Hoyle, 2009). Training process is uniform and regular, but training project is more innovative, unique, with clear beginning and end states (Lidow, 2014). Therefore, training projects are managed in distinctive way than standardised training in organisations.

To analyse the stakeholders' importance in human resource training projects, Weiss's and Wysocki's (1992) theory of project phase and Armstrong's (2009) list of human resource training stages are linked up. Thus, a number of training stages as Establishing of learning needs, Defining of learning objectives, Deciding on content, methods of delivery and on the location and facilities required, the budget and who delivers the programme, Preparing information on the event relate to Project Planning phase. The stage of Delivering the learning corresponds to Project Execution phase, and the stage of Evaluating the learning corresponds to Project Monitoring and Control phase. Only phases of Project Initiation and Project Closure have not analogic stages of human resource training what is conformable to meaning of project.

Since stakeholders involved in human resource training project consider various aspects of such training opportunity, the models of training evaluation are screened out. After analysing of reviews on training evaluation theme (e.g. Scofield, 2010; Zinovieff, 2008), the thirteen models were chosen for further exploration to identify essential criteria of training evaluation to different groups of stakeholders.

In despite of analysed models' conceptual (mainly between so-called "goal-oriented" and "system-oriented" evaluation models) and terminological differences, the similarities between models' proposed criteria were summarised. To summarise these similarities, the content analysis method was used, by which the specific criteria of models were aggregated into thematic groups. As a result, the nine criteria groups are highlight (see Fig. 1). The "Context" comprises aspects of training project referred to target group, training necessity and training goals accordance with training needs of target group. The "Input" relates to such aspects as required resources, number of trainees, project uniqueness, and appropriateness of training content, form and methods to training goal. The "Process" consists of training project's aspects characterised the feedback, adjustment and attendance. The "Reaction" comprises aspects of trainees' satisfaction with the organisation of training and with the training in overall. The "Learning" includes aspects of direct results from training, i.e. acquired knowledge, developed skills and changed attitudes. The "Application" refers to aspects described the application of training results in workplace, organizational support for such application, and changes in trainees' behaviour. The "Effect" consist of aspects expressed the changes in train-

ees' professionalism level in general, in theirs work indicators as productivity, quality etc. and theirs job satisfaction and motivation. The "Efficiency" includes aspects related to changes in financial and economic indicators of organization. The last criteria group, "Societal impact", consists of training aspects characterised the social and economic impact of training on large social groups.

The identified criteria groups and specific criteria within these groups represent the more comprehensive list of potentially significant aspects of training for different stakeholder groups. This list enables training project managers to take into account the broader scope of stakeholders' interests or requirements that could facilitate the usefulness of project.

	Source	Context evaluation	Input evaluation	Process	Activity accounting	Reaction	Satisfaction with the organisation of training	Learning	Organization support & change	Behaviour change	Changes in students' well-being	Organisational results	Return on investment	Psychological capital	Societal impact
Four level model	Kirkpatrick, 1987					+		+		+		+			
CIPP model	Stufflebeam, 1966	+	+			+				+					
CIRO model	Warr, Bird & Rackham, 1970	+	+			+				+					
Five level model	Hamblin, 1974					+		+		+		+		+	
IPO model	Bushnell, 1990		+	+				+				+			
Organisational elements model	Kaufman & Keller, 1994		+		+			+		+		+			+
TVS model	Fitz-Enz, 1994	+	+						+			+			
Five level ROI model	Phillips, 1996					+		+		+		+	+		
Business impact ISD model	Molenda, Pershing & Reigeluth, 1996				+	+		+		+		+			+
Six-stage evaluation model	Brinkerhoff, 1998	+	+			+		+		+		+			
Five levels of professional development evaluation model	Guskey, 2000					+		+	+	+	+				
Decision-based evaluation model	Kraiger, 2002			+				+			+				
Nine outcomes model	Donovan & Townsend, 2004					+	+	+		+		+	+	+	
		1	2	3		4		5	6		7		8	7	9

Evaluation criteria of training projects

(1) Context
(2) Input
(3) Process
(4) Reaction
(5) Learning
(6) Application
(7) Effect
(8) Efficiency
(9) Societal impact

Fig. 1. Aggregation of training evaluation criteria derived from training evaluation models.

In accordance with functional role of stakeholders in human resource training projects, there are such stakeholder groups as trainers, participants, participant's managers, finance managers, executive directors, and personnel specialists (Allan, 2008). For detailed analysis of stakeholders' importance in human resource training projects the three stakeholder groups were selected – potential participants of training project (*participants*), managers of potential participants (*managers*), and training specialists (*providers*).

2. Method

To verify the importance of the criteria of human resource training projects for chosen group of stakeholders the expert method was applied. The three expert groups were formed representing three stakeholders' groups using the opportunity sampling method. Initially each expert group comprise 10 experts, but because of unsatisfactory agreement level of experts was found from preliminary data analysis the expert groups size was reduced. The experts stated different opinion from majority were eliminated. Table 1 shows characteristics of expert groups.

All experts were contacted by face-to-face or e-mail and asked to fill questionnaire, respectively, to rank a) training evaluation criteria group and b) specific criterion within criteria groups. The untied ranking scale was exploited. Experts were offered to rank each of the scale's item in order of importance, from the "1" most important item through the "*m*" least important item.

Table 1. Characteristics of expert groups.

		Participants	Managers	Providers
Number (n)		6	6	9
Occupation	manager	0	6	2
	specialist	6	0	7
Years of experience in current occupation	less than 1	1	0	0
	1 - 2	0	0	2
	3 - 5	3	3	5
	6 - 10	1	2	2
	more than 10	1	1	0

To ensure data reliability the Kendall's coefficient of concordance (W) and Chi-Square were calculated for each questionnaire's scale separately for each expert group, and to identify the importance of criteria group or criterion the Moda (Mo) was detected. The interpretation of expert survey results is formed on the data that show statistical significance.

3. Results

Table 2 demonstrates that there are average level of agreement among experts in majority of questionnaire's scales. It might be explained partly by the small size of expert groups and the request to rank criteria towards training in general, without specifying training details. Nevertheless, there are certain tendencies observed. The *training participants* have consensus on Context of training, while *managers* and *training providers* – on Effect and Societal impact of training; *managers* have a similar views on importance of learning results' Application as well.

Table 2. Agreement level among experts.

		All criteria groups	Context	Input	Process	Reaction	Learning	Application	Effect	Societal impact
Participants	Kendall's W	**0,764***	**0,778**	0,448	0,361	0,444	0,000	0,361	0,028	0,000
	Chi-Square (df)	36,67(8)	9,33(2)	13,43(5)	4,33(2)	2,67(1)	0,00(2)	4,33(2)	0,33(2)	0,00(1)
	Asymp. Sig.	*0,000***	*0,009*	*0,020*	0,115	0,102	1,000	0,115	0,846	1,000
Managers	Kendall's W	0,374	0,444	0,606	**0,694**	0,444	0,361	**0,861**	**1,000**	**1,000**
	Chi-Square (df)	17,96(8)	5,33(2)	18,19(5)	8,33(2)	2,67(1)	4,33(2)	10,33(2)	12,0(2)	6,00(1)
	Asymp. Sig.	*0,022*	0,069	*0,003*	*0,016*	0,102	0,115	*0,006*	*0,002*	*0,014*
Providers	Kendall's W	**0,761**	0,160	0,571	0,333	0,012	0,444	0,481	**0,753**	**1,000**
	Chi-Square (df)	54,82(8)	2,89(2)	25,70(5)	6,00(2)	0,11 (1)	8,00(2)	8,67(2)	13,56(2)	9,00(1)
	Asymp. Sig.	*0,000*	0,236	*0,000*	*0,050*	0,739	*0,018*	*0,013*	*0,001*	*0,003*

*- figures in Bold indicate higher level of agreement

**- figures in Italic indicate that related level of agreement is statistically significant

Based on the results of expert survey the model of stakeholders' importance in human resource training projects is developed (see Fig. 2). The importance of projects' criteria groups is presented for *participants* and *providers*, but not for *managers* because relevant expert group did not demonstrate sufficient level of agreement in order to draw strong conclusions.

The expert survey results reveal that the Context and the Input of training projects have higher importance for *training participants*, while *training providers* value higher the Learning and the Application. As least important criteria group *participants* assessed the Societal impact, and *providers* – the Reaction. *Managers* have not strong

agreement on priorities of criteria groups, but it should be noticed that rank "1" was most given to the Application (n=3; mean rank = 3, that is most higher value in *managers*' estimations) and rank "9" to the Process (n=3).

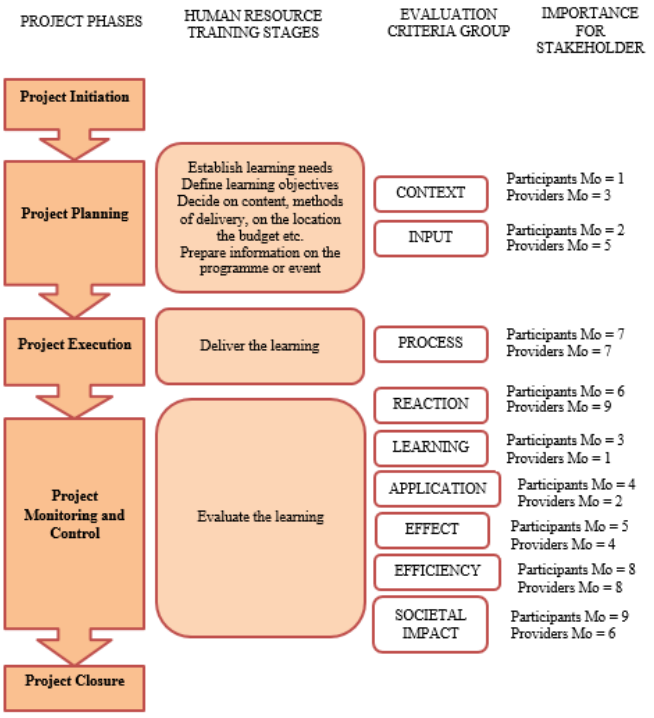

Fig. 2. Model of stakeholders' importance in human resource training projects (1 = most important; 9 = least important).

Looking through opinions of *participants* it could be detected that the most important criterion of training projects within the Context is the eligibility of training goal to *participants'* professional or personal needs. Consequently, the importance of training necessity and the target group is assessed as second and third criterion. As for the Input, where *participants* have average level of agreement, there is a tendency to value more the appropriateness of training content to training goal, the project uniqueness and the required resources (financial, time etc.). The least important criterion in this criteria group is the size of training group.

For *training providers*, in despite of their consensus on high importance of the Learning and Application, there is some disagreement concerning significance of specific criteria. However, in both criteria group is relative consonance about the most important criterion. Respectively, this is the level of developed skills and the application of training results in workplace".

Having rather low level of agreement on priorities of training projects' criteria groups, *managers* share the opinion that the most significant in the Application is the application of training results in workplace. The second is the changes in trainees' behaviour, and third is the organizational support. In other criteria groups received lower estimation as the Effect (Mo = 6; mean rank = 3,5), the Societal impact" (Mo = 5; mean rank = 5,7) and the Process (Mo = 9; mean rank = 7,5) there is consensus on following matters:

- the changes in trainees' work indicators are most important than the changes in social indicators (employee turnover, cohesion, reputation of organisation etc.) and the trainees' benefits derived from training;
- the economic benefits of human resource training projects for society are more important than the social benefits;
- the trainees' attendance is most important factor than the possibility to adjust training process and to receive or give feedback in accordance with *managers'* wishes.

It is worthy to notice that, within criteria group "Effect", *managers* and *providers* have similar viewpoint on importance of the changes in trainees' work indicators, but *providers* value higher the trainees' benefits than the changes in social indicators of organisations. As for the Societal impact of training project, *providers*, unlike *managers*, consider as more important the social benefits.

Conclusions

The study results approve that training participants, providers and managers value differently the various aspects of training projects. For participants the projects' accordance with own professional and personal interests is most important. Providers and managers highly evaluate the application of acquired knowledge, developed skills and changed attitudes in workplace that might be viewed as positive factor for successful cooperation.

From theoretical standpoint, the highlighted criteria of training project evaluation can contribute to further development of the stakeholder value theories. To gain the more complete insight into the importance of stakeholders in the different phases of the training project lifecycle, it remains for further research to investigate the larger sample of stakeholder groups, analysed in this study, and other possible stakeholder groups such as personnel specialists, inner and external sponsors of training, consumers. Because the stakeholders' priorities may differ for specific types of training, it is rationally to explore in future studies the stakeholders' preferences in the context of the certain type of training.

From practical consideration, the proposed model can be used by human resource professionals to develop or choose the human resource training project in accordance with stakeholder approach in organisation management.

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